MMR EARNED

Mathew (Mat) Thompson Earns MMR#595

As a boy, I was aware of trains and was thrilled reading the names of far-away places as boxcars rolled by. But I never lived near a railroad, never knew adults who worked for a railroad, and never saw a train layout.

I was in grade school when a neighbor gave me a box of old *Model Railroaders, Railroad Model Craftsman,* and the long-gone *Model Trains.* Living in rural Oregon, photographs of John Allen's Gorre & Daphetid and construction articles by Jack Work looked like home. PFM was importing Shays, which I had seen rusting in the woods — I was hooked.

For the next several years, I eagerly read the magazines but never had the time, money, or space to do more. In Vietnam, my monthly *Model Railroader* would arrive late and battered. Reading each issue and plotting my future layout was a welcome break from life as a helicopter pilot.

After Vietnam, I stayed in the Army. I could finally afford models. Articles on weathered buildings intrigued me. After copying the techniques on several plastic structures, I realized I could build them too quickly. I went to Vic's Hobby Shop in Portland and explained my problem. The owner suggested Fine Scale Miniatures Weary Willie's Truck Terminal for $8.95.

The instructions were superb. I was able to build the model on the box cover in about 100 hours by patiently following them. For the next several years, my modeling was building wood kits by manufacturers such as Fine Scale, Campbell, Timberline, La Belle, and Ambroid. I also bought some brass logging engines but never had more than a few feet of track or any scenery.

I was a lone wolf modeler. Free time was scarce, and the constant moves of the military made layout construction impractical. I made small starts; however, knowing little about track laying or how to power turnouts, none were successful. In the mid-1980s, while stationed in Germany, I visited hobby shops routinely. I got in the habit of buying a bag or two of trees each trip. The result: my Oregon Coast Railroad has more than 2,000 trees making its Pacific Northwest setting believable.

My final military assignment was in Northern Virginia. We bought a home, and now I had a layout room. I had lots of structures and caught onto scenery pretty quickly. The layout looked good but ran poorly. I decided to meet model railroaders with skills I didn't have by joining the Prince William County Model Railroad Club — a wise move. Bob Rodriquez introduced me to DCC. The late George Hughes taught me how to install decoders and, along with Monroe Stewart (MMR #220), taught me track laying. Pete LaGuardia and I have been sharing our skills and encouraging each other's modeling efforts, including working on AP Certificates, for more than 20 years now.

In 2001, I asked for a Golden Spike evaluation. Ed Price, one of the judges, told me I was ready for the Scenery and Structure Certificates if I would complete the documentation. In the meantime, Ed invited me to join him on several evaluations where I learned the Certificate requirements and judging guidelines.

In the next few years, we moved twice to bigger basements, so it wasn't until 2009 I was ready for AP evaluations. Scenery and Electrical were earned for work completed on my layout. The Structures Certificate was earned for models I built over several years. Other than writing the qualification documents, they needed no extra effort. For the Civil Engineering Certificate, I did hand-lay three operating track configurations. That was new to me. I was intimidated by the prospect. It turned out to be more a job of patience than extraordinary skill.

Author was fun. I like to write, and my Division and Region newsletters were eager for contributions. For years, I had idly thought of creating a website. The Author Certificate was the spur I needed to learn how — http://ocrrnet.ipage.com/ has been up since 2011. Writing articles and maintaining a website also encouraged me to improve my photography skills. Even after I earned the Certificate, I have continued with my writing and photography and had several articles and photos published in national magazines.

Operations have evolved into my favorite part of the hobby. Earning the Chief Dispatcher Certificate requires ten hours as dispatcher. Fortunately, I know Steve King, coauthor of *19 East, Copy 3.* He put me in the dispatcher's chair on his Virginia Midland for several sessions. I earned the Certificate, learned much more about operations, and have seen my operating opportunities increase as layout owners learned I could dispatch.

Earning my last certificate, Cars, was a test of my modeling skills. I had never scratchbuilt a car conforming to the NMRA standard where 90 percent of the pieces must be fabricated from basic materials like strip wood and scribed siding. After three years of false starts and slow building, combined with my wife Victoria's gentle prodding, I finally got it done.

The work to become a Master Model Railroader added several skills to my model railroading trick bag. Better yet, it was fun.

Certificates Earned
Mathew (Mat) Thompson
Master Builder-Scenery
Chief Dispatcher
Model Railroad Engineer-Electrical
Model Railroad Engineer-Civil
Model Railroad-Author
Master Builder-Structures
Master Builder-Cars